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ABSTRACT

Analyses of deviant sexual behaviors have most often derived from psychodynamic or behavioral theory. Little systematic research attention has been paid to the role of intervening cognitive variables such as social perception and the causal attribution process. Two studies were conducted to examine differences in cognition between child molesters and control groups. The first study explored causal attributions for sexual arousal in 19 child molesters in court-order outpatient treatment and 19 non-pedophilic adult males. The results revealed that molesters perceived their sexual arousal as being internally caused and more stable over time, when compared to controls. The second study examined gender identity perception by operationally defining the quality of perceptions of gender through the production of human figure drawings. Subjects were 23 child molesters and 28 male college students. Results from the second study showed that molesters' view of themselves and of women differed from the views held by male college students. Specifically, molesters appeared to perceive themselves as smaller and less powerful than women and to exhibit confusion regarding gender differentiation. The findings from both studies suggest that child molesters may experience and think about sex in a significantly different way from sexually non-deviant men. (Author/NB)

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SEXUAL AROUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS AND GENDER IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD MOLESTERS

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SEXUAL AROUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS AND GENDER IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD MOLESTERS

Two studies are described which examined differences in cognition between child molesters and control groups. Study 1 examined causal attribution for sexual arousal and found that molesters perceived their sexual arousal as being internally caused and more stable over time, when compared with controls. Study 2 examined gender identity perception and found that molesters' view of themselves and women differed from that of college males. Specifically, molesters appeared to perceive themselves as smaller and less powerful than women and to exhibit confusion regarding gender differentiation. Both studies, then, suggest that child molesters may experience and think about sex in a significantly different way from sexually non-deviant men.

SEXUAL AROUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS AND GENDER IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD MOLESTERS

Analyses of deviant sexual behaviors, particularly child molestation, have most often derived from psychodynamic or behavioral theory, stressing, on the one hand, ideas such as unconscious fixation and regression, and on the other hand, models of classical and operant conditioning. To date, little systematic research attention has been paid to the role of intervening cognitive variables, such as social perception and the causal attribution process. Psychotherapists working with sexual deviants often find that this population experiences sexual arousal and sexual identity in a fundamentally different way from non-deviant males. Thus, the purpose of the present paper is to report on two studies which explore differences between sexually deviant and non-deviant men in their causal attributions for sexual arousal and in their perception of sexuality and gender.

In Study 1 (Eskapa, 1983), 19 child molesters in court-ordered outpatient treatment and 19 non-pedophilic adult males were assessed to determine if differences existed in how they accounted for becoming sexually aroused. It was hypothesized that child molesters would perceive the causes of their sexual arousal in a fundamentally different manner from non-deviant men. The three dimensions of causal attribution suggested by

Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale (1978) were used. It was hypothesized that child molesters, consistent with the notion of narcissism, would see the causes of their sexual arousal as relating more to internal than external causes. In other words, it was predicted that child molesters would tend to see the causes of their sexual arousal as deriving from "something about them", rather than reflecting attributes of their sexual partner. Because of the kind of sexual obsessiveness and compulsiveness revealed by many child molesters, it was also hypothesized that child molesters would be more likely to see the causes of their sexual behavior as stable over time in comparison with attributional ratings of non-deviant men. Similarly, it was also hypothesized that child molesters would see their sexual arousal as having generalized implications throughout their life (global attribution) as compared with non-deviant men, who would see their sexual arousal as having few implications for other domains of their life (specific attribution).

Eight scenarios were developed describing situations in which the subject was asked to imagine that he became sexually aroused while with an adult partner. Subjects were then asked to rate the causes of their sexual arousal (internal vs. external, stable vs. unstable, and global vs. specific) on 6-point response scales for each of the eight

scenarios. Thus, subjects' scores on the three scales could vary from a low of 8 (indicating maximally internal, stable, and global) to a high of 48 (indicating maximally external, unstable, and specific). Analysis indicated that each attributional dimension for sexual arousal was reliably measured with internal consistency reliability coefficients of .85 for the internal-external scale, .86 for the stable-unstable scale, and .80 for the global-specific scale. T-tests performed on these data indicated that the outpatient child molesters were signficantly more likely to attribute the causes of their sexual arousal to internal factors than were college men in the control group [$t(36) = 1.70$, $p < .05$]. In fact, the mid-point of the scale was 28.0 with the child molesters obtaining a mean score of 27.10 and a standard deviation of 10.45, while the college men obtained a mean score on the internal-external dimension scale of 32.15 and a standard deviation of 7.68. These data not only indicate a statistically significant difference on this attributional dimension but further reveal that child molesters literally see the causes of their sexual arousal as internal, while for college men it is clearly external.

While both child molesters and college men saw the causes of their sexual arousal as being stable or con-

sistent over time, analysis revealed that molesters were significantly more likely to see the causes of their sexual arousal as stable over time in comparison with the control group [$t(36) = 1.69$, $p < .05$]. Clearly, for child molesters, then, if they had experienced sexual arousal toward a person in the past, they thoroughly expected that any future meeting would again result in sexual arousal.

With reference to the globality-specificity dimension, child molesters indicated a greater tendency (though not a statistically significant one) to see the causes of their sexual arousal as having implications for their life in general [$T(35) = 1.27$, $p < .11$]. Though not statistically significant, this finding is in the hypothesized direction and lends credence to the overall notion that sexual arousal is experienced by child molesters in a fundamentally different manner than by non-deviant men. The differences observed in Study 1 are clearly consistent with the often-made clinical observation regarding the narcissistic and compulsive sexual behavior of child molesters.

In Study 2 (Johnston & Johnston, 1986), the quality of child molesters' perceptions of gender was operationally defined through the production of human figure drawings. Specifically, 23 child molesters and

28 college men were asked to draw pictures of a male and female. The two most important hypotheses tested in this study dealt with the relative size of the drawings of men and women (i.e., it was hypothesized that child molesters would draw their pictures of women larger than men), and differential quality of gender perception (i.e., it was hypothesized that child molesters would reveal poorer gender differentiation in their drawings, producing pictures of masculine women and/or effeminate men). Inter-rater reliability co-efficients were .88 for differential size and .70 for gender quality, indicating that both these concepts could be measured reliably.

Data analysis indicated that approximately 90 percent of college men drew their picture of a man larger than their picture of a woman. This is, of course, consistent with physical reality as well as previous research observations. As expected, though, approximately 60 percent of child molesters drew their picture of a woman larger than their picture of a man. This difference was statistically significant [$t(49) = 2.96$, $p < .001$]. The second major hypothesis, that child molesters would reveal poorer gender differentiation than college men, was also confirmed [$t(49) = 3.08$, $p < .001$]. Child molesters were, for example, significantly more likely to

produce pictures revealing poorer overall quality, as well as, more specifically, pictures possessing poorer gender differentiation (i.e., pictures of females lacking breasts or hips and possessing square shoulders).

These two studies strongly suggest the potential importance of intervening cognitive variables in analysis of child molesters. These data indicate that the child molester's experience of sex, sexual arousal, and sexuality may differ considerably from that of the "normal" male. Study 1 suggests a narcissistic sexual arousal attribution process in which the child molester appears to focus on his own internal needs and urges to the relative disregard of characteristics of the partner. This study also suggests the possible role of obsessional cognitions regarding sex and sexual gratification. Study 2 implies that, in addition to differntial cognition, the social perception of child molesters (particularly as it relates to gender and gender identity) is quite different from the norm. The kind of fear of women which child molesters express in therapy sessions may be cited in explaining their tendency to draw women larger than men. Indeed, these data suggest that for child molesters women tend to be perceived in an exaggeratedly powerful and disturbing fashion. Interestingly, the child molester also appears

to possess a less differentiated perception of masculine and feminine characteristics which may be closely associated with the molester's feelings of uncertainty or ambiguity regarding his own sexual identity. Thus, traditional clinical concepts, such as those of narcissism and gender identity confusion and anxiety, appear to fit very closely with the cognitive differences described in Study 2.

Future work should both concentrate on elucidating cognitive differences as well as relating these differences to their affective and behavioral correlates. In so doing, a comprehensive theory of sexual deviance, particularly with regard to child molesters, can be developed along with identification of appropriate therapeutic interventions.

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